

Washington, D.C. - U.S. Congresswoman Melissa Bean (IL-08) announced her nomination of Jimmie Smith, Executive Director of Kids Hope United in Lake Villa, for the national "Angels in Adoption" award. The two joined other Members of Congress and additional nominees at a national awards ceremony hosted by the Congressional Coalition on Adoption Institute (CCAI) in Washington, D.C on Tuesday, September 13, 2005.

U.S. Representatives and Senators selected more than 180 Congressional "Angels in Adoption" for their outstanding contributions toward the welfare of children in the United States foster care system. These "Angels in Adoption" have worked to raise Congressional and public awareness about the tens of thousands of foster children in the United States and the millions of orphans around the world in need of permanent, safe, and loving homes. Chosen from all 50 states and the District of Columbia, the "Angels in Adoption" were recognized for their exceptional work as adoption champions resulting in many of these children realizing their basic need of a family.

"As an adoptee myself, I am especially pleased to nominate Jimmie Smith for the 2005 Angels in Adoption award," Bean said, "With his committed leadership of Kids Hope United, Mr. Smith has helped improve the lives of countless children and families in Illinois' child welfare system. Kids Hope United has flourished under his positive, creative and disciplined approach.

"Jimmie Smith is already widely respected for his child-centered, family-focused and community-based perspective," Bean said, "and I am proud to honor him with this national recognition."

Kids Hope United is a nationally regarded human services organization with over 100 years of history serving children and families. Kids Hope United proudly serves 15,000 vulnerable children and their families every day from its headquarters in Chicago and through 40 service centers in Illinois and elsewhere. Kids Hope United is one of the largest and very few child welfare organizations to offer a diverse array of prevention, intervention, and community-based programs and services. In Illinois, Kids Hope United has developed and implemented a diverse array of intervention services for youth to strengthen families and has become the state's largest provider of comprehensive community-based youth services. These services continue to successfully divert youth from the juvenile justice system today.

The Congressional Coalition on Adoption Institute (CCAI) is a nonprofit, nonpartisan organization dedicated to raising awareness about the tens of thousands of foster children in this country and the millions of orphans around the world in need of permanent, safe, and loving homes; and to eliminating the barriers that hinder these children from realizing their basic need of a family.

The Angels in Adoption program is CCAI's signature public awareness program, which provides an opportunity to all members of the U.S. Congress to honor the good work of their constituents who have enriched the lives of foster children and orphans. Established in 1999, the program began as a Congressional press conference. Since then, the program has developed into a yearlong public awareness campaign culminating in an awards Gala and celebration in Washington, D.C.

The Angels in Adoption are selected by their member of the U.S. Congress and are chosen from all 50 states and the District of Columbia. Each year, more than 160 members of Congress participate, making it the year's single most significant Congressional event pertaining to child welfare in the United States. Since the program's inception in 1999, members of Congress have awarded more than 720 congressional Angels in Adoption from all 50 states and invited them to attend the extraordinary awards banquet in their honor. This year more than one hundred and eighty members of Congress participated.

The evening also included awarding "National Angels", recognized for their adoption and foster care work on a broader scale. This year's National Angels were First Lady Laura Bush; Victoria Rowell, award winning actress and founder of The Rowell Foster Children's Positive Plan; Jars of Clay, the multi-platinum, Grammy Award winning recording artists and founders of Blood:Water Mission; and Sesame Workshop, the Emmy award winning television program. President George W. Bush served as Honorary Chair of the Angels in Adoption Gala. Tom Jarriel, award winning journalist for ABC, served as Master of Ceremonies and Jars of Clay provided this year's entertainment.

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